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ON PAGE 6-A

WASHINGTON TIMES  
28 May 1985

# Sifting the obits for Arab intelligence

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THE WASHINGTON TIMES FOREIGN SERVICE

JERUSALEM — By 9 o'clock every morning, an Israeli colonel and his staff will have carefully read and analyzed every page of a dozen Arab language newspapers from the occupied areas and nearby Jordan.

By the end of the day, another specialized team will have gone over the papers delivered by courier from Egypt, Lebanon and Syria.

Particular attention is paid to funeral notices and, even more, to messages of condolence. They occupy considerable space in the papers. Their tenor might indicate rifts, allegiances and possible new alliances.

This operation represents perhaps less than one percent of Israel's effort to stay ahead of its Arab neighbors and enemies.

The effort is impressive in its precision — and awesome in its failure.

Israel has managed to emerge victorious in five wars with the Arabs by its superior organization, the sheer will for survival — and the chaotic nature of the enemy.

So far it has not succeeded in planning for every possible contingency and its reactions to various Arab moves have often been erratic and improvised.

Presumably it could not have been otherwise, given the nature of the area.

Logic, perception, minutely computerized intelligence data can often go wrong when it comes to various local outbursts, decisions made in the heat of discussion, an unpredictable political rift pitting one Arab capital against another often against all reason.

"Never in recent history has a country so consistently misunderstood its immediate neighbors in any area of the world," Andrew I. Kill-

gore, a former U.S. ambassador, wrote recently.

This indictment is clearly too harsh. Israel has frequently outmaneuvered its Arab enemies and it has many experts well versed in the area and its strengths, weaknesses and contradictions.

But Israel has often made mistakes — which are easily criticized with the benefit of hindsight.

The present Israeli strategy toward the Arab world is based on such key elements as the volatility of Arab leadership, its failure to honor commitments and the unquestionable advantage of the Iraq-Iran war.

Israel is doing its best — within the limits of budgetary stringency — to keep the war going by aiding Iran. The reasons are simple and were explained recently by Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin in a conversation with a group of newsmen.

"If the Gulf war were over, our situation would worsen," the minister said. "Iraq has a million men under arms, 26 combat divisions and modern hardware. As long as it's bogged down in that war, it leaves us alone."

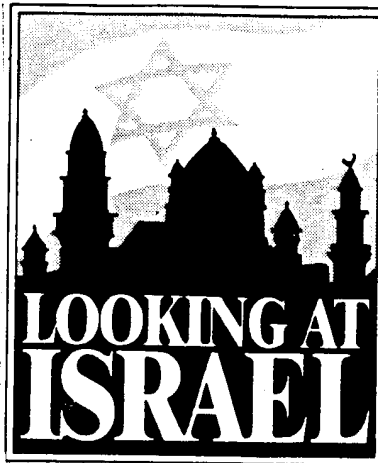
Syria also preoccupies Israeli military planners but, on the whole, they don't feel that the Syrian leadership wants another all-out confrontation soon. According to Mr. Rabin, what the Syrians are more likely to do is "use terrorism as the main instrument of harassment of Israel."

Israeli Arab experts feel that Syria's main concern is to prevent a pos-

sible deal with Israel by what they call the "Cairo-Amman-Baghdad axis."

This "axis," according to the view prevailing here, has U.S. support because it opposes "radical" Arab countries such as Syria, which is backed by the Soviet Union.

The Israelis regard Iraq as "totally dependent" on Jordan as a transit area for its supplies and on the rich Gulf states for the financing of the war. The reason for the financial effort is the fear by the conservative traditional Arab governments of the Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalist



revolution, which is gradually undermining the foundations of established Arab order.

Israel's principal interest is to keep the war going, simply to bleed the Arabs of

lives and funds and keep their attention diverted from the Jewish state.

Finally there is the delicate question of Lebanon, which Israel invaded in June 1982 to smash the infrastructure of the Palestine Liberation Organization and from which it is now withdrawing without really achieving this objective. But the Shi'ites are succeeding in doing just that.

To quote Mr. Rabin:

"After three years of war in Lebanon the threat of terror has not been eliminated. New terror — Shi'ite terror — has been created. I can't say it's an encouraging development."

Israeli leaders feel that Lebanon "is totally under Syrian influence, its government a puppet of Syria." That is why the government here has

decided any effort to deal with Beirut officialdom is a totally pointless exercise.

The forthcoming disengagement from Lebanon does not mean that Israel will entrust its security to the Christian militias, at present in the throes of crisis.

"The security zone will be built by those who live there. The idea is to keep the border villages free from terrorism — or make them suffer reprisals," Mr. Rabin says.

"The local forces will be backed by us," he continues. "Whenever there is trouble we will come to their

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assistance. I can assure you that if terror continues it will not remain one-sided."

In short, Israel is withdrawing from Lebanon but that country's southern areas will remain the continuing target of its punitive operations.

Few people here or elsewhere in the Middle East believe that the Lebanese border villages are capable of "cleansing themselves" of terrorism. They did not resist the PLO when it reigned over southern Lebanon. They greeted Israeli troops in 1982 as "liberators" but eventually were forced to give shelter and succor to the predominantly Shi'ite resistance movement.

The result was Israeli repression and a series of punitive raids.

Now it looks as though the southern area of Lebanon is condemned to more carnage. The villagers are incapable of keeping potential terrorists out and consequently will suffer from Israeli reprisals. The Christian militia is unlikely to become a solid deterrent to Israeli action.

Once again Israel will create more enemies and, eventually, will have to devise a new policy. At this stage no one here knows what it might be.